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## THE STILTS OF GOLD.

By the Author of "A High Life Tragedy."

Mrs. MACKEREL sat in her little room,  
Back of her husband's grocery store,  
Trying to see through the evening gloom,  
To finish the baby's pinafore.  
She stitched away with a steady hand,  
Though her heart was sore, to the very core,  
To think of the troublesome little band,  
(There were seven, or more.)  
And the trowsers, frocks, and aprons they wore,  
Made and mended by her alone.  
"Slave, slave!" she said, in a mournful tone  
"And let us slave, and contrive, and fret,  
I don't suppose we shall ever get  
A little home which is all our own,  
With my own front door  
Apart from the store,  
And the smell of fish and tallow no more."

These words to herself she sadly spoke,  
Breaking the thread from the last-set stitch,  
When Mackerel into her presence broke—  
"Wife, we're—we're—we're, wife, we're—  
we're rich!"  
"We rich! ha, ha! I'd like to see;  
I'll pull your hair if you're fooling me."  
"Oh, don't, love, don't! the letter is here—  
You can read the news for yourself, my dear.  
The one who sent you that white crape shawl—  
There'll be no end to our gold—he's dead;  
You know you always would call him stingy,  
Because he didn't invite us to Injy;  
And I am his only heir, 'tis said.  
A million of pounds, at the very least,  
And pearls and diamonds, likely, beside!"  
Mrs. Mackerel's spirits rose like yeast—  
"How lucky I married you, Mac," she cried.  
Then the two broke forth into frantic glee.  
A customer hearing the strange commotion,  
Peeped into the little back-room, and he  
Was seized with the very natural notion  
That the Mackerel family had gone insane;  
So he ran away with might and main.

Mac shook his partner by both her hands;  
They dance, they giggle, they laugh, they  
stare;  
And now, on his head the grocer stands,  
Dancing a jig with his feet in air—  
Remarkable feat for a man of his age,  
Who never had danced upon any stage  
But the High-Bridge stage, when he set on  
top,  
And whose green-room had been a green-grocer's shop.  
But that Mrs. Mac. should perform so well,  
Is not very strange, if the tales they tell  
Of her youthful days, have any foundation.  
But let that pass with her former life—  
An opera-girl may make a good wife,  
If she happens to get such a nice situation.  
A million pounds of solid gold  
One would have thought would have crushed  
them dead;  
But dear they bobbed, and courtesied, and  
rolled  
Like a couple of corks to a plummet of lead.  
'Twas enough the soberest fancy to tickle  
To see the two Mackerels in such a pickle!

It was three o'clock when they got to bed;  
Even then through Mrs. Mackerel's head  
Such gorgeous dreams went whirling away,  
"Like a Catherine-wheel," she declared next day  
"That her brain seemed made of sparkles of fire  
Shot off in spokes, with a ruby tire."

Mrs. Mackerel had ever been  
One of the upward-tending kind,  
Regarded by husband and by kin  
As a female of very ambitious mind.  
It had fretted her long and fretted her sore  
To live in the rear of the grocery-store.  
And several times she was heard to say  
She would sell her soul for a year and a day  
To the King of Brimstone, Fire, and Pitch,  
For the power and pleasure of being rich.

Now her ambition had scope to work—  
Riches, they say, are a burden at best;  
Her onerous burden she did not shirk,  
But carried it all with commendable zest;  
Leaving her husband with nothing in life  
But to smoke, eat, drink, and obey his wife.  
She built a house with a double front-door,  
A marble house in the modern style;  
With silver planks in the entry floor,  
And carpets of extra-magnificent pile.  
And in the hall, in the usual manner,  
"A statue," she said, "of the chased Diana;  
Though who it was chased her, or whether they  
Caught her or not, she could, really, not say."  
A carriage with curtains of yellow satin—  
A coat-of-arms with these rare devices:  
"A mackerel sky and the starry Pisces"—  
And underneath, in the purest fish-latin,  
*If fishibus flyabus*  
*They may reach the skyabus!*

Yet it was not in common affairs like these  
She showed her original powers of mind;  
Her soul was fired, her ardor inspired,  
To stand apart from the rest of mankind;  
"To be A No. one," her husband said;  
At which she turned very angrily red,  
For she couldn't endure the remotest hint  
Of the grocery-store, and the mackerels in't.  
Weeks and months she plotted and planned  
To raise herself from the common level;  
Apart from even the few to stand





Who'd hundreds of thousands on which to revel.

Her genius, at last, spread forth its wings—  
Stilts, golden stilts, are the very things—  
“I'll walk on stilts,” Mrs. Mackerel cried,  
In the height of her overtowering pride.  
Her husband timidly shook his head ;  
But she did not care—“For why,” as she said,  
“Should the owner of more than a million pounds

Be going the rounds

On the very same grounds

As those low people, she couldn't tell who,  
They might keep a shop, for all she knew.”

She had a pair of the articles made,  
Of solid gold, gorgeously overlaid  
With every color of precious stone  
Which ever flashed in the Indian zone.  
She privately practised many a day,

Before she ventured from home at all ;  
She had lost her girlish skill, and they say

That she suffered many a fearful fall ;  
But pride is stubborn, and she was bound  
On her golden stilts to go around,  
Three feet, at least, from the plebeian ground.

‘Twas an exquisite day,

In the month of May,

That the stilts came out for a promenade ;  
Their first entrée

Was made on the shilling side of Broadway :  
The carmen whistled, the boys went mad,  
The omnibus-drivers their horses stopped,  
The chestnut roaster his chestnuts dropped,  
The popper of corn no longer popped ;  
The daintiest dandies deigned to stare,  
And even the heads of women fair  
Were turned by the vision meeting them there.  
The stilts they sparkled and flashed and shone  
Like the tremulous lights of the frigid zone,  
Crimson and yellow and sapphire and green,  
Bright as the rainbows in summer seen ;  
While the lady she strode along between  
With a majesty too supremely serene  
For anything but an American queen.  
A lady with jewels superb as those,  
And wearing such very expensive clothes,

Might certainly do whatever she chose !  
And thus, in despite of the jeering noise,  
And the frantic delight of the little boys,  
The stilts were a very decided success.

The *crème de la crème* paid profoundest attention,  
The merchants' clerks bowed in such wild excess,  
When she entered their shops, that they strained

their spines,

And afterward went into rapid declines.

The papers, next day, gave her flattering mention :

“The wife of our highly-esteemed fellow citizen,  
A Mackerel, of Codfish square, in this city,  
Scorning French fashions, herself has hit on one  
So very piquant and stylish and pretty,  
We trust our fair friends will consider it treason  
*Not to walk upon stilts, by the close of the season.*”

Mrs. Mackerel, now, was never seen

Out of her chamber, day or night,

Unless her stilts were along—her mien

Was very imposing from such a height

It imposed upon many a dazzled wight,

Who snuffed the perfume floating down

From the rustling folds of her gorgeous gown,

But never could smell through these bouquets  
The fishy odor of former days.

She went on her golden stilts to pray,

Which never became her better than then,  
When her murmuring lips were heard to say,  
“Thank God, I am not as my fellow men !”

Her pastor loved as a pastor might—

His house that was built on a golden rock ;  
He pointed it out as a shining light

To the lesser lambs of his fleecy flock.

The stilts were a help to the church, no doubt,

They kindled its self-expiring embers,  
So that before the season was out  
It gained a dozen excellent members.

Mrs. Mackerel gave a superb soirée,  
Standing on stilts to receive her guests ;  
The gas-lights mimicked the glowing day  
So well, that the birds, in their flowery nests,  
Almost burst their beautiful breasts,  
Trilling away their musical stories  
In Mrs. Mackerel's conservatories.  
She received on stilts ; a distant bow  
Was all the loftiest could attain—

Though some of her friends she did allow  
To kiss the hem of her jewelled train.

One gentleman screamed himself quite hoarse  
Requesting her to dance ; which, of course,  
Couldn't be done on stilts, as she  
Hallooed down to him rather scornfully.

The fact is, when Mackerel kept a shop,  
His wife was very fond of a hop,  
And now, as the music swelled ana rose,  
She felt a tingling in her toes,  
A restless, tickling, funny sensation  
Which didn't agree with her exaltation.

When the maddened music was at its height,  
And the waltz was wildest—behold, a sight !  
The stilts began to hop and twirl  
Like the saucy feet of a ballet-girl,  
And their haughty owner, through the air,  
Was spin, spin, spinning everywhere.  
Everybody got out of the way  
To give the dangerous stilts fair play.

In every corner, at every door,  
With faces looking like unfilled blanks,  
They watched the stilts at their airy pranks,  
Giving them, unrequested, the floor.  
They never had glittered so bright before ;



The light it flew in flashing splinters  
Away from those burning, revolving centres ;  
While the gems on the lady's flying skirts  
Gave out their light in jets and spirits.  
Poor Mackerel gazed in mute dismay  
At this unprecedented display :  
"Oh, stop, love, stop !" he cried at last,  
But she only flew more wild and fast,  
While the flutes and fiddles, bugle and drum,  
Followed as if their time had come.

She went at such a bewildering pace  
Nobody saw the lady's face,  
But only a ring of emerald light  
From the crown she wore on that fatal night.  
Whether the stilts were propelling her,  
Or she the stilts, none could aver.  
Around and around the magnificent hall  
Mrs. Mackerel danced at her own grand ball.

"As the twig is bent the tree's inclined ;"  
This must have been a case in kind.  
"What's in the blood will sometimes show—"  
Round and around the wild stilts go.

It had been whispered many a time  
That when poor Mack was in his prime  
Keeping that little retail store,  
He had fallen in love with a ballet-girl,  
Who gave up fame's entrancing whirl  
To be his own, and the world's no more.  
She made him a faithful, prudent wife—  
Ambitious, however, all her life.  
Could it be that the soft, alluring waltz  
Had carried her back to a former age,  
Making her memory play her false,  
Till she dreamed herself on the gaudy stage ?  
Her crown a tinsel crown—her guests  
The pit that gazes with praise and jests ?

"Pride," they say, "must have a fall—"  
Mrs. Mackerel was very proud—  
And now she danced at her own grand ball,  
While the music swelled more fast and loud.

The gazers shuddered with mute affright,  
For the stilts burned now with a bluish light,  
While a glimmering, phosphorescent glow  
Did out of the lady's garments flow.  
And what was that very peculiar smell ?  
Fish, or brimstone ? no one could tell.  
Stronger and stronger the odor grew,  
And the stilts and the lady burned more blue ;  
'Round and around the long saloon,  
While Mackerel gazed in a partial swoon,  
She approached the throng, or circled from it,  
With a flaming train like the last great comet ;  
Till at length the crowd  
All groaned aloud,  
For her exit she made from her own grand ball  
Out of the window, stilts and all.

None of the guests can really say  
How she looked when she vanished away.  
Some declare that she carried sail  
On a flying fish with a lambent tail ;  
And some are sure she went out of the room  
Riding her stilts like a witch a broom,  
While a phosphorescent odor followed her track :  
Be this as it may, she never came back.

Since then, her friends of the gold-fish fry  
Are in a state of unpleasant suspense,  
Afraid, that unless they unselfishly try  
To make better use of their dollars and sense  
To chasten their pride, and their manners mend  
They may meet a similar shocking end.

#### AN ART HOMILY.

UNDER the head of "Another Picture, and the Best of All," the editor of the *Milwaukee Daily, Wisconsin*, gives us this pleasant and suggestive homily :

"Pictures are next to books, in the pleasure they afford to the cultivated mind. And even to all persons these have a charm for the senses—for that part of the mind which feels rather than thinks. Through this influence the heart is cultivated to greater refinement and purity, and the more the heart is cultivated, the better will be the actions and lives of men. Pictures therefore, in a measure, educate and improve us. Pictures are, therefore, a blessing. And we are always glad to see good pictures distributed through the community. While they are improving in their influence, they are more readily studied by the masses than books. The masses are apt to be too much engaged in toil, or too indifferent, to pore over books.

"But pictures catch their eye as they pass through the streets. They stop at a show window, and take in the lesson of a fine picture in a few minutes, and the seed goes into their hearts, and sprouts and grows up to the perfect grain. You have seen the street crowd stop and gather about bookstore windows, to look at the pictures hung inside; they are as intent and earnest over them as children over simpler pictures. There is no study of the mind, but the eye is charmed and fascinated, and through that the heart is improved, and men made better. We welcome, therefore, the fine pictures which are annually distributed through the country by the Cosmopolitan Art Association.

The best engraving they have yet published, is the one for the coming season, entitled, *Shakspeare and His Friends*. In addition to a veritable portrait of the immortal bard, it contains authentic portraits of Raleigh, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Bacon, Southampton, Dekker, Dorset, and others, admirably grouped, and forming a noble collection of worthies. It is a superior engraving, and fairly deserves a frame of gold."

#### AT VESPERS.

By F. A. Parmenter.

Lo ! through the misty trembles of pure flame  
That glowed upon the altar, marble-white,  
I saw dream-shadowed faces sadly gaze,  
And vanish, then, amid the purple night !

The mount of vision I that day had climbed,  
And viewed the realm ideal spread below,  
Amid whose golden borders dimly glides  
The river of Existence, sad and slow.

And now, alas ! that I had once more come  
Within the boundaries of the narrow Real,  
Dim faces gleamed amid the altar-smoke,  
Their foreheads stamped with God's high spirit-seal !

And sadly beckoning me with ghostly hands,  
Where perfumed censors idly swing in tune,  
My soul its golden shackles would have burst,  
And roamed as free as twilight winds of June ;

Ay, mounting o'er the dim cathedral-roof,  
Its vesper-song hymn through the aisles of Heaven ;  
But ah ! it could not be, and till this day  
Its galling bondage-chain remains unbroken.

Yet soon, I know, will come the blessed hour,  
When life shall realize its high ideal,  
And in another sphere, fruition find,  
Of those great things I now but dimly feel.

#### TO A LADY—S. M. T.

A LADY asks that I would weave  
A little wreath for memory's shrine,  
A word and wish together wreath  
In fragrant bond and rhythmic line.

A lady asks ! in olden years  
Those words had wrought a magic spell,  
And eagle plumes and knightly spears  
Had bent to know that maiden's will.

An hundred pennons flung in air,  
An hundred lances couched in rest,  
Had writ her name in conquest there  
On cloven shields and broken crest.

Those times are past, those fires are spent,  
And knight and maiden sunk to rest,  
And ladies now are quite content  
With gentler task and easier test.

So lady ! since thou ask'st a wreath,  
With this I'll crown thy fair young brow,  
And dare a hope that ever 'neath  
A cloudless sky thy vessel's prow

May life's wide waters smoothly part,  
And no dark spirits, from their deep,  
With chilly finger touch thy heart,  
To break thy dream and see thee weep.

W. R. D.